

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RANGOO 01622 081052Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 AID-05 TRSE-00 HA-05 EB-08 ACDA-12
/118 W

-----041265 081311Z /43

R 080915Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5336
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MANDALAY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 1622

DEPT PASS AID/ASIA AND AID/OFDA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, PBOR, BM, BG
SUBJ: MUSLIM REFUGEES FROM BURMA

REF: RANGOON 1537

1. ON MAY 3 AND 4, AN EMBASSY OFFICER VISITED THE ARAKAN STATE CAPITAL OF AKYAB. WHILE THERE HE MET WITH MAJ. KYAW MAUNG, CHAIRMAN OF THE STATE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL, WHO REPORTED THAT THERE WERE SOME 400,000 BENGALI MUSLIMS IN THE STATE, OF WHICH HE ESTIMATED MORE THAN 50,000 WERE THERE ILLEGALLY. THE CHAIRMAN DENIED CATEGORICALLY THERE HAD BEEN ANY TROOP MOVEMENTS INTO THE STATE APART FROM A 200 MAN SPECIAL IMMIGRATION TEAM TO HELP CARRY OUT THE SURVEY. SINCE THE SURVEY BEGAN LAST FEBRUARY,
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THE CHAIRMAN ESTIMATED ONLY 4000-5000 MUSLIMS HAD LEFT THE STATE. HE SAID THERE HAD BEEN A FEW EXCHANGES OF GUNFIRE WHEN THE MUSLIMS HAD SHOT AT IMMIGRATION INSPECTORS. STORIES OF MURDER, RAPE AND OTHER MISTREATMENT OF MUSLIMS AT THE HANDS OF BURMESE FORCES HE CHARACTERIZED AS "ABSURD". HE SAID THE BURMA ARMY IS TOO DISCIPLINED FOR SUCH CONDUCT AND NOT THAT "SEXY." THE CHAIRMAN, WHO ACCOMPANIED THE

FOREIGN MINISTER ON HIS RECENT TRIP TO DACCA, SAID HE WAS VERY SURPRISED BY THE PROPAGANDA OUTBURST FROM BANGLADESH, WHICH IN HIS VIEW IS GROSS EXAGGERATION AND RAISES A SERIOUS NEW OBSTACLE TO BILATERAL TALKS ON THE BORDER PROBLEM. REGARDLESS, HE SAID BURMA FIRMLY INTENDS TO CARRY ON WITH OPERATION DRAGON KING AND TO ARREST, PROSECUTE, JAIL AND DEPORT ALL THOSE ILLEGALLY PRESENT IN THE ARAKAN STATE.

2. A TOTALLY DIFFERENT STORY WAS TOLD BY MR. S. A. L. MUSTAKIM, BANGLADESH CONSUL IN AKYAB, WHO, LIKE THE EMBASSY OFFICER, IS NOT PERMITTED TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE CITY. MR. MUSTAKIM CLAIMS THE BURMA ARMY HAS SENT IN REINFORCEMENTS BY AIR AND IS RAIDING MUSLIM VILLAGES IN THE BORDER AREAS, RAPING, SHOOTING, ETC., TO DRIVE INHABITANTS ACROSS THE BORDER. HE CLAIMS ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FROM BANGLADESH IN RECENT YEARS HAS BEEN MINIMAL, BUT THAT A GREAT MANY MUSLIM RESIDENTS DO NOT HAVE ANY DOCUMENTS BECAUSE BURMESE OFFICIALS EITHER HAVE FAILED TO ISSUE THEM OR CONFISCATED THEM. THE CONSUL SPECULATED THAT THE GUB WANTS TO ALTER PERMANENTLY THE ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE BORDER REGION, DRASTICALLY REDUCING THE PRESENT 80-90 PERCENT MUSLIM MAJORITY. HE THINKS IT IS BEING DONE AT THIS TIME TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF BANGLADESH AT A MOMENT OF EXTREME WEAKNESS. THE BURMESE FEAR, HE BELIEVES, THAT A STRONGER BANGLADESH IN THE FUTURE MIGHT TRY TO ANNEX THE NORTHERN ARAKAN STATE.

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3. COMMENT: AMIDST ALL THESE CONFLICTING REPORTS, WE ARE STILL UNABLE TO GET AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF THE SITUATION ON THE BURMA SIDE OF THE BORDER. UNDOUBTEDLY, THE TRUTH LIES SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE TWO OFFICIAL VERSIONS. A BURMESE EMPLOYEE OF THE EMBASSY AT PRESENT IS TRYING TO TRAVEL IN BORDER AREA AND WE ARE NOW AWAITING HIS REPORT.
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